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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 MUSCAT 002178

SIPDIS

STATE FOR NEA, NEA/IPA, NEA/ARPI, NEA/RA
NSC FOR P. THEROUX

E.O. 12958: DECL: 12/15/2014

TAGS: PREL XF IS MU

SUBJECT: (C) OMAN FM HOSTS QUIET BILATERAL WITH ISRAELI MFA
OFFICIAL

Classified By: Ambassador Richard L. Baltimore III.
Reason: 1.4 (b, d).

Summary

¶11. (C) On December 13, at the margins of an Executive Council meeting of the Middle East Desalination Research Center (MEDREC), an Israeli Foreign Ministry official held a private 90-minute bilateral with Minister Responsible for Foreign Affairs Yusuf bin Alawi. The discussion reportedly focused on Palestine, Syria, and Iran. While the Israeli and Omani viewpoints did not always coincide, the Israelis were greatly encouraged by the relaxed and open nature of the conversation, and by signs that positive trends toward Middle East peace will likely spur continued bilateral contacts with Oman. End summary.

An Auspicious Opportunity

¶12. (C) Visiting NEA/RA Senior Advisor for S&T Charles Lawson, attending an Executive Council meeting of the MEDRC, informed us of the Israeli delegation's readout of the Israelis' December 13 bilateral meeting with Minister Responsible for Foreign Affairs Yusuf bin Alawi (YBA). (Note: MEDRC is a vestige of the MEPP Track II initiatives coming from the peace process prior to the second Intifada. The US, EU, Japan, Israel and Arab neighbors belong to it; MEDREC's headquarters is in Muscat. End note.)

¶13. (C) According to a technical water expert on the Israeli delegation, Tel Aviv viewed Oman's decision to host the MEDRC Executive Council as an opportunity for a low-key bilateral with MFA Under Secretary Sayyid Badr al-Busaidi, who is Oman's representative on the Council. After working to get Omani concurrence for the Israeli MFA's Deputy DG for Near East Affairs Shalom Cohen to join the delegation, the Israelis were disappointed to learn that Sayyid Badr would be going to Rabat for the Forum for the Future meeting and thus not be available. They were informed, however, that YBA himself would meet with Cohen.

On Palestine, Syria and Iran

¶14. (C) The Israelis informed Lawson that the lunchtime meeting on December 13 actually lasted a full 90 minutes, with YBA conducting a relaxed and open conversation. The two sides reportedly agreed on the need to support Abu Mazen, with YBA noting that the interim Palestinian leader is due to visit Muscat on December 18. YBA allegedly held open the possibility that, should Israel permit the Palestinian elections to take place under reasonable conditions, the Omanis could perhaps welcome another Israeli MFA visit at the DG level in late March.

¶15. (C) On the subject of Syria, the Israelis claimed that YBA was frank in offering his advice, warning Tel Aviv not to take seriously any Syrian overtures for negotiations at the present time. YBA was said to have recounted his personal experiences with the Syrian President, for whom he initially had high hopes but now sees as being essentially tethered to the conservative holdovers from his father's regime. YBA reportedly also said that Syria may be limited in its ability to rein in Hezbollah, fearing the organization has grown too strong to control. The Israelis reportedly disagreed with this assessment. On Iran, YBA's main thrust was that Tehran was currently focused inward and need not be viewed with undue concern, either with respect to nuclear ambitions or Hezbollah. (Note: This characterization of YBA's views on Iran are not wholly consistent with our experiences with him. End note.) Again, the Israelis reportedly disagreed on the scope of the Iranian threat.

A Positive Start

16. (C) In total, the Israelis gave a positive assessment of their longer-than-expected meeting with the Minister. While no specifics were addressed on the issue of reopening the Israeli trade mission in Muscat, for instance, the inference was that a continuation of working-level contacts is wholly possible should recent positive trends prevail. As further evidence, one of the Israeli water experts was invited December 14 to meet with scientists at Sultan Qaboos University on the possibility of cooperation in the area of cloud seeding. The Israelis proudly noted that the Omani MFA put a car and driver at their disposal. We are likewise encouraged that YBA took advantage of this meeting, perhaps partially in response to our encouraging Oman to find ways to promote Middle East peace in light of recent changes in the Palestinian leadership.

17. (U) NEA/RA Lawson did not clear this message.
BALTIMORE